Statewide Professional Learning Community: Teacher and Student Voices What is making the difference for Utah students?

FOCUS: This electronic journal is a way to highlight the impact of the Utah Core Standards on teachers who are changing their instruction so that student learning and academic challenge are at the CENTER of all adult collaborative efforts. These collaborative efforts shape a Statewide Professional Learning Community that is OPEN to all and includes the Utah State Office of Education, every school district and charter LEA, each school and classroom in ALL eight regions of Utah, from Bear Lake to Monument Valley.

The PROFESSION of teaching is based on our capacity to learn with each other for the purpose of benefitting ALL Utah students, their families and communities.

Volume 3: In Volume 3 secondary teachers in grades 6-12 continue to write about how they are adjusting their instruction to support all students in achieving the more rigorous Utah Core Standards.

Theme: Teaching Argumentation

Teacher reflection in response to the question: How have you changed your instruction to better support your students in achieving success with the new Utah Core Standards?

IMPACT OF THE ON-LINE BOOK STUDY: George Hillock's – Teaching Argument Writing

May 2012

May I begin by stating that this is the first book that I have read in quite some time that has actually changed my instruction. I have read this book from cover to cover and have implemented many of the ideas in my classroom. Toward the end of the book the teaching content is too mature for my eleven and twelve year olds, but I was surprised at how these young kids were able to construct warrants and create pieces of writing that had logical arguments with supporting facts.

I started with the investigations. One of my colleagues had the book of different "crime scenes" and students really got into solving the "crimes" and got very good at writing

why with warrants and evidence as to why their theories were correct. Once we had done this a few times as a whole class, I had students work in pairs and then present their information. We highlighted their warrants and evidence. Once we had done this students were ready to start this process on their own. I gave each student a different picture/clue/investigation and then they submitted their reports. Finally, I had one small reading group move to writing and I used the lesson, "Richard Cory" from the Nevada Write Works site and adapted it to this format. I had students write new stanzas for the poem/song that we were comparing and then create one more piece of evidence of their choosing that would be part of their evidence pool for writing their reports on what happened to Richard Cory.

As team leader, it was my goal to get my team to have students produce six major writing pieces to the published stage and in their portfolios by the end of the year. We adapted three of the pieces to include argument writing. The first was a piece titled, Why Would You Want to Live There? Students were given a country and they had to create three warrants as to why a person would want to live in that country or what makes that country a great place to live. Students had to be very creative with their arguments. Why do you want to live in Pakistan? We developed basic warrants about why we like to live in the places that we do live in now. We also talked about why people want to live in America. The country reports were some of the best I have ever read. The kids had to actually learn about the country and find out what makes it a great place to live.

Finally, we did a comparison essay that used warrants and argumentative writing to choose between two ancient cities. In sixth grade we learned about the ancient cities of Athens and Sparta. We compared the two civilizations. Students were asked to develop warrants to report why they would choose to be a citizen of one city or the other. These were interesting essays.

Overall I would recommend this book to teachers of writing. I found it very useful and I learned a lot about writing that I didn't know before and I feel like I have better prepared students for future writing assignments.

- Monique Straughan, Grade 6 Timpanogos Intermediate

After Monique completed the statewide online book study through Collaborize Classroom, she recruited her colleagues at Timpanogos and they did a Face-To-Face version of the book study.

WE INVITE YOU TO BE ENGAGED IN THIS STATE WIDE LEARNING COMMUNITY.

TO JOIN A NEW COHORT OR START A NEW GROUP FOR YOUR SCHOOL JUST EMAIL: Christelle.estrada@schoole.utah.gov

A similar Hillock book study experience was designed by Marci Nelson, who had been a 2011 Core Academy Facilitator, and her team member, Leslie Garbanati, at Adele C. Young Intermediate School in Box Elder School District.

As Marci and Leslie later wrote:

"The 6th and 7th grade teachers met bi-weekly. We assigned the reading and written reflections and also invited participants to lead part of the discussions. This provided opportunities for teachers to read and study individually, then share their thinking with the group.

This book study provided our teachers with a solid background in teaching argumentative writing. As language arts teachers and PLC leaders, we felt it was an important step forward in implementing the Utah Core."

"Argument writing goes beyond trying to get someone to think the way you think with a few reasons to support your thinking...Children have to support their ideas with REAL evidence and then link that to criteria that are relevant to that argument."

- Barbara Klein

"Many educators and writers express the opinion that argument writing and persuasive writing are virtually the same type of writing. I thought so too, before I read <u>Teaching</u> Argument Writing by George Hillocks, Jr...

... I found this book study a great starting point in my learning about argument writing. With all of the ideas presented, I have plenty of material to begin restructuring my curriculum around the new core for English Language Arts. Although this seems like a daunting task right now, I am sure with the help of amazingly able colleagues and knowledgeable administrators, I will be able to begin revamping lessons for the upcoming school year."

- Susan Saunders

"The book by Hillocks, begins with a separation of two concepts: persuasive and argument writing. Persuasive writing is about changing your opposition's opinion using any means possible such as picking out the most advantageous evidence and hiding the3 rest, using emotion, or delivering it in a charismatic style. It relies on delivering certain evidence in the most favorable way to cause a change in opinion... On the other hand, argument writing relies on logic, backing up claims or ideas with evidence in a more scientific way. It is using critical thinking to break down and highlight facts to make informed decisions on what these ideas represent.

Knowing this difference and applying this information has and will greatly impact my teaching. In society, it is not enough a voice an opinion. There is so much information presented that society wants to know why one opinion is valid and the factual evidence to back it up. I have only begun to implement principles from argument writing into my assignments but I have already seen a large change in my student responses.

Overall I feel that teaching argument writing cannot only help my students' writing, but it can help how they think and express their own ideas."

- Angelyn Scheel

"Warrants or the common sense rules are my favorite element in argument writing.

They provide such provocative discussions with students. Hence we have engagement.

Overall, I feel that argument writing is a positive step in developing critical thinking, oral communication and writing skills needed to survive in college and more importantly life in general. Hillocks' book has been one of my personal favorites, so useful on many levels."

- Barbara Findley

"The most important differences between persuasive and argument writing are the beginnings. In persuasive the beginning is a prompt. In argument the beginning is a question of problem. Persuasive then becomes an attempt by the author to convince readers to believe the author's opinion about the prompt. Argument writing progresses from question or problem to a data set, evidence, warrants, rules and a genuine search for truth.

These differences in persuasive and argument writing change my teaching because it allows me to take my students from promotion of their own opinion – which is really only valuable in marketing or politics – to the real world of inquiry. Students become the investigators who ask questions, gather data, analyze that data, select evidence, create warrants and rules, and use all of it to reach a substantive position of truth.

In addition, it is much easier as a teacher to guide students through the creation of a data set, when those students actively seek that data. They are on task because they see themselves as investigators instead of passive participants in someone else's activity. The typical writing questions that bombarded teachers during persuasive writing assignments, such as "How long does it have to be," "How many sentences do I have in a paragraph," and - my favorite – "What does it have to be about," diminish considerably with argument writing.

Another change to my teaching is that the election of writing topics becomes much more intensely front loaded for me, as opposed to simply choosing a prompt for persuasive. If I choose the questions that students need to answer, I need to be sure that there is sufficient opportunity for them to collect data. Argument writing is a much more involved process for me, the teacher, as well as for my students as writers.

Argument writing brings learning to a point of 'realness' that stops another frequently asked question: 'Why do we have to do this?' Students can see real data they are gathering. They can see the real evidence they determine from the data. They can see the real rules produced from the previous activities. My teaching is changed forever by the book <u>Teaching Argument Writing</u>, and for that I am forever grateful!"

- Mary Beth Farrer

EXCERPTS FROM THE ON-LINE COLLABORIZE CLASSROOM CONVERSATION

FROM <u>Cohort Three</u>: English and Social Studies Teachers from Kanab secondary schools, Glendale Middle School in Salt Lake School District and Social Studies teachers throughout the state

The preface enlightened me as to the difference between persuasion and argument. In the past, I have used those terms interchangeably; now, however, I won't. I also really liked the idea of starting with the data first--although I have never attempted this in my teaching, I realize that in my own writing (when obtaining my degrees), that was exactly what I was doing. It makes so much more sense to teach it this way--I am excited to experiment with this during the upcoming school year. Finally, the emphasis that way too much teacher talk (and thus NOT enough student talk!) is occurring in the classroom rang true to me. I will watch out for this in the upcoming year, and be very careful to provide ample opportunities for student discussion and exploration so they don't zone out in complete boredom while I am droning on and on. . . .

Week One – Posted by L. L.: July 16

I agree with Laura's post. Before reading Hillock's definitions I had also used the terms argument and persuasive synonymously. I realized after reading the first few chapters of this book that I have merely been teaching my students how to write a 5 paragraph essay based off of their own opinions, rather than really giving them the opportunity to research, gather data, and interpret information based off of critical thinking. I have not experienced the "flow" with my students, nor do I believe that I have really utilized clear goal-setting and appropriate and individual feedback. I am ashamed to say, but my writing instruction has been very cookie cutter and formulaic.

Week One – Posted by B.S.: July 16

In today's world, people are being bombarded with propaganda and advertising which appeal to the emotions. They are encouraged to buy products which can make us happy, healthy, attractive, and popular. People are spending their money for these products without questioning their claims.

I agree that people are increasingly unable to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from lies. By helping students become critical thinkers, they can evaluate the claims of others without being fooled by their advertising tricks. If we help students write strong arguments, it will help them evaluate the arguments and claims of others. Stressing the importance of finding data that support our claim is becoming more important in this day and age.

Week One – Posted by N. S.: July 18

I also connected to the discussion regarding the differences between persuasion and argument and the emphasis on starting with data rather than claims. For my teaching, I am particularly drawn to the list on p. 5 "Planning for Active Engagement and Flow". In order for students to actively buy into argumentation, they must have a sense of ownership and control of the task.

- Week One – Posted by V. E.: July 22

In the preface, I was struck by Aristotle's breakdown of category of argument, "...forensic, epideictic, and deliberative. I have found it useful to designate these are arguments of fact, judgment, and policy and approach them in that order, moving student from simpler to the more complex," (Heinemann, xvii). This seemed like a simple two-sentence outline to an entire year of teaching argument writing. I think it may address a small aspect of the "flow" discusses in earlier posts. If I can keep that sequence and develop it throughout the year within writing and classroom debates, etc. I just might have found a comfortable way of developing and guiding teaching that previously I have had little to no comfort with/confidence in teaching.

- Week One - Posted by A. C.: July 26

The statement made in the preface that "the test makers do not know what constitutes evidence any more than our youngsters do." was startling. I think that is the biggest struggle for me, as a history teacher. I know when I read a good argument, and when a student has thrown relevant facts into their writing, but I have a hard time explicitly teaching and assessing an argument. I think it is vitally important, but I'm hoping Hillocks can reteach me how to approach essays in my class.

- Week One – Posted by C. M.: July 26

The information and philosophies presented in the reading sections provided incredible insight into effective argument teaching. Many of the ideas were good reminders of the teaching styles of some teachers I've had in the past - and blaring arguments against the methods of other teachers. One of the points that stood out most to me was understanding the difference between persuasion and argument. It is vital that we help our students understand that persuasion and using emotion to convey ideas is not argument writing. Instead, we must help students use logic to present evidence and back up that evidence to answer a question posed by the data. As stated in the reading sections, it should be our goal as teachers to go beyond simply having our students write. We should be teaching them skills of observation, research, analysis, and presentation of ideas that will reach beyond the walls of a classroom and help them be more discerning and productive participants in society.

- Week One – Posted by BJ: July 30

I agree that learning to make judgments based on criteria is critically important in today's world.

I really liked the ideas behind the Giraffe Award Activity - focusing on people who "stick their necks out for the common good" and who do something "to make the world a better place." It emphasizes the positive - acknowledging those who make the world a better place.

Students could nominate individuals or groups who meet the criteria and defend their decisions on who should receive the awards. They could also show how people should not receive the award because they do not meet the criteria.

I found helpful the ideas on teaching students how to work in small groups. They should be able to monitor their behavior and complete the task effectively. They need to monitor their groups for off-task behavior, clarify points and use language thoughtfully and politely.

When students know how to use critical thinking and make judgments based on criteria, they can help solve society's problems and make our communities and world a better place.

- Week Seven - Posted by Nancy on 9/16/2012

I think this chapter made it clear how important it is for me as a teacher to make sure our students are able to see things from more than one point of view. As the text states, "many of our students see things in absolute terms. Such simplistic thinking blocks one's ability to make inferences." It is so important that we help our students look at an argument from all angles and create criteria that go beyond the simple interpretation of the argument. It's also important to remember that our students' basis of judgment will be shaped by what they have learned their entire life. I hope to help my students look at a concept from a variety of angles and develop criteria that go beyond the simplistic view and into a more detailed, encompassing interpretation of the information they are given.

- Week Eight – Posted by Ben on 9/1-/2012

This paragraph summarizes in a "nutshell" exactly what my frustrations have been with students since I began teaching. I have really made an effort to increase my explicit instruction in the interpretation of text. After reading this book over the summer I was determined to incorporate two major elements into my instruction this year...

1. The use of book circles where students not only read the text, but actually have a job to complete that involves and interpretation of the text. Each member shares their thoughts and in this way students will be not only reading books, but engaging in and discussing books as well. I have to admit that their discussions are not stellar, YET. I am guessing though, that with continued practice and guidance from me, that by January their discussions will be more thoughtful and inferential.

2. Explicit instruction in reading a story and writing to a prompt. Every Friday I now read a story with my students and answer a writing prompt question that asks them to support their thinking with evidence from the text. This has also been a slow process that really involves more of me doing and them following along, but again, I expect that later on in the year that these students will be able to do this with little guidance from me.

This book has truly helped me to make some changes in my instruction this year that goes beyond writing and extends into reading and thinking as well. I have found the activities to be engaging and relevant and I can't wait to see how my students progress using the ideas from this book.:)

Week Nine – Posted by Brooke on 9/17/2012

Commentary and Connections: Powerful Learning for Adults and Using USOE developed Digital Books as an Open Education Resource

- Christelle Estrada, Secondary English Specialist, USOE

INTRODUCTION: Based on the survey of over 1500 secondary English language Arts teachers after the 2011 Summer Core Academy there were three areas that were identified as the most challenging as teacher began to re-design their instruction to implement the new core standards:

1) Teaching argument writing; 2) assessment as student performance tasks; and access to informational texts that were leveled based on the three criteria of Text Complexity.

Consequently, teams of secondary educators who had been Core Academy facilitators worked together last year in Saturday Seminars to assess text sets and develop student performances tasks based on the new Utah Core Standards. One culminating project was the development of digital books which are now online:

http://my.uen.org/myuen/71005

Also for more information on the newly developed Journalism curriculum, the entire K-12 Core Standards for English Language Art & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects with appendices, and other professional learning opportunities go to:

http://www.schools.utah.gov/CURR/langartsec/

Another project is the development of an ITunesU course for supporting teachers in grades 6-8 in teaching informational text. This course is free to anyone who has access to an ITunes account. It will be completed by October15 and provides opportunity for USOE Credit based on which units are completed and each individual's time commitment.

The use of digital books, informational texts, and student performance tasks will be the basis for this year's Saturday Seminars beginning in October. All secondary teachers are invited. For more information and registration go to:

http://www.uen.org/News/article.cgi?category_id=2&article_id=2814

PREVIEW OF DIGITAL BOOKS' TEACHERS EDITION

USOE Digital Books for secondary English Language Arts are on both the UEN website and the USOE secondary language arts website. These resources are free and available to anyone. The student's edition will include a wide range of complex informational texts by grade bands: six through eight; nine through ten; and eleven through twelve. These texts have been assessed by teacher teams for text complexity by using both *quantitative* lexile level and *qualitative* criteria.

The purpose of the USOE Digital Books is to ensure that teachers and students have access to a wide range of texts. For the 2012-2013 academic year, this edition is focusing on INFORMATIONAL and LITERARY NON-FICTION. USOE Digital Books for secondary English Language Arts are a supplemental DIGITAL resource that will be developed and expanded each year.

USOE Digital Books for secondary English Language Arts:

- ARE NOT intended to take the place of novels or other literary genres that are taught at each grade level based on local district and school resources and criteria.
- ARE NOT curriculum.
- DO NOT currently align to any English course or take the place of a textbook used in schools for **literary** texts.

The Teacher's Edition includes added resources to better support educators as they analyze their current instructional lesson design and adjust teaching to the expectations

for more rigorous standards of student performance and cognitive rigor based on the learning needs of the students.

Another goal is to redirect resources used to purchase traditional textbooks so that teachers and students will have access to a wide range of instructional materials in a digital format.

Teachers can use whatever is helpful for them in designing the kind of instruction that will increase each student's capacity to read increasingly complex texts and apply that understanding to writing, specifically argument and expository writing.

The appendices include the following:

Appendix A: The Cognitive Rigor Matrix and samples of constructed response prompts to show the depth of knowledge level and rubrics for students and teachers to assess writing in the Utah Core standards with a focus on argumentation.

Appendix B: A clear explanation of text complexity and rubrics to support teachers in assessing both quantitative and qualitative criteria for text complexity. Other tools will focus on "Knowing the Student as a Reader," better understanding the needs of a wide range of students.

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APPENDIX A: COGNITIVE RIGOR

How do we develop instruction that is increasingly more rigorous and supportive?

The Cognitive Rigor Matrix and samples of constructed response prompts to show the depth of knowledge level and rubrics for students and teachers to assess the three kinds of writing in the Utah Core standards: argument, expository, and narrative.

DOK-1 – **Recall & Reproduction** - Recall of a fact, term, principle, concept, or perform a routine procedure

DOK-2 - Basic Application of Skills/Concepts - Use of information, conceptual knowledge, select appropriate procedures for a

task, two or more steps with decision points along the way, routine problems, organize/display data, interpret/use simple graphs

DOK-3 - **Strategic Thinking** - Requires reasoning, developing a plan or sequence of steps to approach problem; requires some decision making and justification; abstract, complex, or nonroutine; often more than one possible answer

DOK-4 - **Extended Thinking** - An investigation or application to real world; requires time to research, problem solve, and process multiple conditions of the problem or task; non-routine manipulations, across disciplines/content areas/multiple sources

TO SEE THE COMPLETE APPENDIX GO TO: http://my.uen.org/myuen/71005

APPENDIX B: TEXT COMPLEXITY

How do we determine Text Complexity for our Students?

The purpose of determining text complexity is to support each student in becoming independent and proficient readers of a wide range of texts, including various literary genres and styles, literary non-fiction like essays, autobiography and biography, and informational text including technical subjects. Both career and college demand stamina to read increasingly complex texts for understanding content and applying that understanding to new situations, whether in the work, academic or everyday life settings.

There are three criteria for determining appropriate text complexity at each grade level band: 1) quantitative, 2) qualitative, and 3) reader and task assignment.

TO SEE THE COMPLETE APPENDIX GO TO: http://my.uen.org/myuen/71005

EXCERPT FROM GRADE BAND 6-8 DIGITAL BOOK: TEACHER EDITION

The 6-8 Digital Book student learning tasks included in this document generally focus on building and assessing students' critical reading skills along with argument and expository writing skills. The student learning tasks are organized by theme and complexity, with less complex texts and tasks labeled as 6th grade, and most complex texts and tasks labeled 8th grade. However, it is important to note, that the Utah Core Standards are organized in bands so that teachers can use their professional judgment to determine what is best for *their students*. The texts and tasks in the 6-8 Digital Book may be appropriate to use in any middle level class depending on students' needs.

The thematic organization of the 6-8 Digital Book is meant to support the Utah Core Standards' focus on analysis of multiple texts within a theme. For this reason, a limited amount of literary texts are also included to support thematic connections among texts. Additionally, a number of the themes included are intended to support content area teachers in implementing the Utah Core Standards in their classes. The Utah Core Standards outline parallel literacy standards for social studies, science, and technical subjects, so students benefit from the connections made between ELA and Content Area classes. Critical literacy skills are necessary across all disciplines, and this Digital Book is meant to promote interdisciplinary literacy.

While the student learning tasks in the 6-8 Digital Book do include some supports and strategies, they are not exhaustive. We suggest that you as the teacher include whatever scaffolding and teaching strategies you feel appropriate to maximize student learning. Part of this support may include instruction of academic vocabulary. With the Utah Core Standards' emphasis on higher level and critical thinking, comes a new set of vocabulary that both teachers and students need to incorporate into the classroom. A glossary of tier three skill words that are used in the Utah Core Standards and the 6-8 Digital Book student learning tasks is included for this reason.

A distinction must be made between the two types of constructed response tasks: extended writing tasks and shorter writing to read tasks. While extended writing tasks are meant to be taken through the entire writing process (prewriting, drafting, editing, revision, and publishing), writing to read tasks are not. Writing to read tasks help students to understand text, and they help teachers assess student comprehension. Therefore, writing to read tasks should not be graded based on grammar and punctuation, but on content and demonstrated understanding of the text. Because of this distinction, the 6-8 Digital Book includes two types of writing rubrics: one for extended writing tasks (included within each learning task) and one for short written response, or writing to read, tasks (included in this explanation).

Lastly, keep in mind that this Digital Book is meant to be a tool for educators, not a curriculum and not a summative assessment. Feel free to use excerpts or to augment the student learning tasks as you feel necessary to best support your students in becoming college and career ready.

NEXT EDITION – December: What is authentic assessment and how does it support increased cognitive rigor.

Highlights from Adult Learning that Matters: How Utah teachers are making a difference for Utah students

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